Applicants gratefully appreciate the Examiner granting an in-person interview with their representative, Mr. Stephen Weyer. In accordance with that interview, Applicants have amended the claims consistent with the discussions of the interview. In particular, during the Examiner interview, the Examiner suggested changing the preamble from "comprising" to "consisting essentially of", further defining the "continuous process", and possibly include the molar ratio of selenium in the form of sodium selenite to metal compounds to the EDTA complexes.

Claim 1, currently amended, more clearly defines the continuous process and the method for preparing a trace element solution wherein a single solution is prepared which comprises more than one EDTA complex as a sodium salt in a continuous process by suspending either disodium EDTA in water or suspending EDTA acid in water with sodium hydroxide and adding a metal compound to the EDTA solution to form the EDTA complex. Sodium selenite is added to the solution of EDTA complexes.

Applicants respectfully submit that claim 1, currently amended, is further distinguished over and free of the prior art of record and in particular Howard U.S. Patent No. 4,335,116 which was the subject of a 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) rejection to prior claims 1 and 3-12 in the Final Office Action of August 27, 2002. Elements which distinguish claim 1 (currently amended) from that of Howard include a single continuous process which is used for forming the EDTA complex with a metal compound whereas Howard clearly teaches a batch method for preparing its EDTA in metal complexes (see Howard, column 7, lines 32-68).

Further, the claimed invention recites a method which includes suspending either disodium EDTA in water or suspending EDTA acid in water with sodium hydroxide

whereas Howard clearly teaches its solution is prepared by dissolving tetrasodium salts of EDTA acid (see Howard, column 7, lines 32-35).

Yet another difference between the claimed invention and that of Howard is that the claimed invention uses sodium selenite whereas Howard clearly discloses the use of an organic complex of selenite-glycine (Howard, column 5, lines 15-20 and column 7, lines 11-13).

With regard to claim 5, the present invention recites using metal compounds selected from the group consisting of metal oxides, metal hydroxides and metal carbonates whereas Howard clearly teaches the use of metal chlorides such as zinc chloride, manganese chloride and copper chloride (Howard, column 7, lines 36-38, 44-47, 51-54, and 60-62). Based on the foregoing discussion, the present invention is clearly not taught or suggested by Howard.

Moreover, there are significant secondary considerations which make the novel invention not obvious from the prior art. The use of a continuous process allows for an increase in product generated and a decrease in the time necessary to produce the trace elements. Further, the method of Howard has been known for over 20 years yet no practical application of the process has been used or known to be used by the Applicants. Conversely, the present invention has been used to produce over 3,000,000 does in the U.S. alone. Applicants surmise that one reason why the present invention has been employed widely while the prior art of Howard has not is that the present method provides for an increased concentration of trace element not possible by the method taught in Howard.

Furthermore, there is no motivation or suggestion for one of ordinary skill in the art to modify the disclosure of Howard by changing the batch process of forming an

EDTA complex and a metal compound to a continuous process as claimed. Furthermore, there fails to be any teaching, suggestion or motivation to add sodium selenite to a solution of EDTA complexes as claimed in place of the selenite-glycine complex added to an EDTA complex solution disclosed in Howard.

In view of the foregoing, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 1, 5-7, and 9-12 are not obvious from the prior art and in particular Howard.

By this Amendment, Applicants have added new method claim 13 dependent from claim 1 which recites the molar ratio of selenium in the form of selenium selenite to metal compounds to the EDTA complexes which vary between 1:4.8:4.8 and 1:19:19. Subject matter basis for these molar ratios can be found in the present application as filed and therefore claim 13 does not constitute new matter. In addition, because this claim is dependent upon claim 1, no new issues are raised, and Claim 13 should be allowable for the same reasons as set forth with regard to claim 1 above. Moreover, Applicants submit that the recited molar ratios further distinguish the present invention from that of Howard which demonstrates that the claim process is more efficient in producing a desired trace element solution.

In view of the foregoing, Applicants respectfully request entrance of the present amendment and allowance of the present claims.

Respectfully submitted,
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